

January 19, 1876.

My dear Doctor Bowditch

In reply to your inquiry of
January 17th, I unhesitatingly express the opinion
that a great collection of Pathological Anatomy like
the Army Medical Museum, will, if it continues to
receive such pecuniary support from Congress that
its development and growth may be continuous, must

certainly exercise a beneficial influence upon the public health, and especially by aiding medical investigators in their study of the causes of disease; a knowledge of which underlies all wise preventive measures.

Undoubtedly the chief reason why our best preventive measures fall so far short of our needs is because we have so little exact knowledge of the causes of disease. I know it is fashionable for certain sanitarians to talk flippantly in public addresses, as if we knew all about these causes; and I am often moved by scorn and pity at the complacency with which they utter their platitudes. But those who know most of disease know best how inadequate are the general causes, which figure in the sanatory jargon of the day, to produce the specific morbid processes which are causing so much sickness and death around us, and recognize humbly how much we have yet to learn with regard to etiology.

The causes of disease must of course be investigated otherwise than by the road of pathological anatomy alone; especially is the path of experimental pathology full of promise, but the knowledge of the morbid processes which can only be attained by the help of anatomical investigations is an indispensable collateral study, and so much remains to be done in this direction that for a long time to come the activity of many industrious workers will be required.

So long as this is the case Museums such as ours is becoming and ought to be, must have a vast sphere of usefulness. It is in vain to hope that such institutions will grow up without government patronage, for they require what is to individuals considerable pecuniary outlay and bring in no pecuniary recompense. Recognizing this fact, every civilized government in the world except our own has long granted liberal pecuniary aid to institutions of this class. The Army Medical Museum is the first step of our own government in the right direction.

In conclusion I may add that the Library of the Surgeon General's Office cannot fail to exercise a beneficial influence in the same direction. It is already the largest medical library in America. The same pecuniary reasons which must prevent the establishment of a great pathological museum, except by government aid, will prevent the creation of a great medical library except with the same assistance. I cannot but hope that our legislators will have the intelligence to sustain these promising nurslings, to whose future growth all medical investigators and scholars in the United States look forward with so much hope.

Very sincerely yours

J. J. Woodward.